Consumer Guide

FCC Broadcast Ownership Rules

The Federal Communications Commission sets limits on the number of broadcast stations – radio and TV – an entity can own, as well as limits on the common ownership of broadcast stations and newspapers. As required by Congress, the FCC reviews its media ownership rules every four years to determine whether the rules are in the public interest and to repeal or modify any regulation it determines does not meet this criteria.

Details of the current ownership rules are summarized below.

Newspaper and Broadcast Station Cross-Ownership

In 2017, the Commission eliminated its rules that previously prohibited common ownership of a full-power broadcast station and daily newspaper if the station's contour (defined separately by type of station) completely encompassed the newspaper's city of publication and the station and newspapers were in the same relevant Nielsen market, when defined. At the same time, the Commission eliminated the cross-ownership rule restricting common ownership of broadcast radio and television stations located in the same market. These two rules, the newspaper-broadcast cross ownership and radio-television cross-ownership rules, were eliminated considering the growth in the number and variety of sources of local news and information in the modern marketplace.

National TV Ownership

The National TV Ownership rule does not limit the number of TV stations a single entity may own nationwide so long as the station group collectively reaches no more than 39 percent of all U.S. TV households. For the purposes of calculating the "national audience reach," TV stations on UHF channels (14 and above) count less than TV stations operating on VHF channels (13 and below), this is also known as the UHF Discount. The National TV Ownership rule is no longer subject to the FCC's quadrennial review.

Dual TV Network Ownership

FCC rules effectively prohibit a merger between any two of these networks: ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC.

Local TV Multiple Ownership

An entity is permitted to own up to two TV stations in the same Designated Market Area if either:

- The service areas – known as the digital noise limited service contour – of the stations do not overlap
- At least one of the stations is not ranked among the top four stations in the DMA (based on audience share), and at least eight independently owned TV stations would remain in the market after the proposed combination

Local Radio/TV Cross-Ownership

Ownership restrictions are based on a sliding scale that varies by the size of the market:

- In markets with at least 20 independently owned "media voices" (defined as full power TV stations and radio stations, major newspapers, and the cable system in the market) an entity can own up to two TV stations and six radio stations (or one TV station and seven radio stations).

- In markets with at least 10 independently owned "media voices" an entity can own up to two TV stations and four radio stations.
- In the smallest markets an entity may own two TV stations and one radio station.

In all markets, an entity must comply with the local radio and local TV ownership limits.

Local Radio Ownership

Ownership restrictions are based on a sliding scale that varies by the size of the market:

- In a radio market with 45 or more stations, an entity may own up to eight radio stations, no more than five of which may be in the same service (AM or FM).
- In a radio market with between 30 and 44 radio stations, an entity may own up to seven radio stations, no more than four of which may be in the same service.
- In a radio market hosting between 15 and 29 radio stations, an entity may own up to six radio stations, no more than four of which may be in the same service.
- In a radio market with 14 or fewer radio stations, an entity may own up to five radio stations, no more than three of which may be in the same service, as long as the entity does not own more than 50 percent of all radio stations in that market.

Consumer Help Center

For more information on consumer issues, visit the FCC's Consumer Help Center at www.fcc.gov/consumers.

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